

‘Why be envious because I am generous?’ (Matthew 20:15).

This is the time of year when we usually thank God for his generosity in creation, particularly if we have enjoyed a good harvest of fruit or vegetables in our gardens or fields. Building on this centuries old tradition of ‘harvest thanksgiving’ the Catholic church in conjunction with a number of other Christian denominations has recently adopted September as a ‘season of creation’. As this is a focus for our parish throughout this year with the ‘live simply challenge’ I thought I would share some thoughts on this topic for the remaining Sundays of this ‘season’. If you were hoping for some reflections on the Gospel parable then please see the front page of the newsletter which is available physically in church or digitally on the parish website.

Five years ago Pope Francis issued an encyclical letter entitled ‘Laudato Si’ (Praise be to you). This title is taken from the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, a saint who was able to express his appreciation for all aspects of God’s creation. It is quite a long document (180 pages) and I don’t propose to try and summarise it all, but I will try and capture some of the main points that Pope Francis makes drawing from already established church teaching including the teaching of his immediate predecessors as Pope.

Firstly something about the word ‘creation’. It comes naturally to us as Christians, but it is not necessarily a word that is used by others who might prefer to talk about ‘nature’ or ‘ecology’ or similar words. However for us as Christians to speak of creation means that we acknowledge that we have a Creator and this awareness must shape the way in which we relate to ‘creation’.

We are familiar with the account of creation in the Bible (Genesis 1-3). Initially everything was harmonious, but after the fall Adam is told that he will have to work hard to obtain his food from the soil (Gen 3:17). Incidentally it was only after the flood that God gave Noah permission to eat the flesh of animals (Gen 9:3). Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us that through our human reason we can know the presence of the Creator in creation (Romans 1:20) but he also speaks of ‘creation groaning’ (Romans 8:22) as it awaits its ultimate fulfilment.

In his letter Pope Francis picks up this theme of ‘creation groaning’ and talks about the earth crying out because of the harm that we as humans have inflicted on her. As some of you will know before becoming a priest I studied Civil Engineering at University. One of the oldest definitions of Civil Engineering is ‘the art of directing the great sources of power in nature for the use and convenience of man’. Certainly over the centuries humans have made great progress, so much so that many of us are spared the necessity to work hard with our hands for the food we eat, but there is a balance to be found between using the earth responsibly and exploiting and abusing it in an irresponsible way. It is also important to note that the people who suffer most when the earth is used in an irresponsible way are those who are the poorest.

Towards the end of his letter the Pope speaks of both simple gestures that individuals can make and also the necessity for societal change through civic and political activity. Not everyone is called to get involved in civic and political activity although we should inform ourselves the best we can. However all of us can do small things with love. The monthly and

quarterly 'live simply challenge' activities are those kinds of little things and I am sure there is something on those lists that we could try to do. Pope Francis suggests something even simpler, to give thanks to God before and after each meal.

'That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need'. (Laudato Si 227).

If we have got out of the custom of doing this, or perhaps never experienced or developed this custom before, then this is one simple and practical action we can take to acknowledge the generosity of God of which today's Scripture readings so eloquently spoke of.

For video link see: https://youtu.be/Gf1_CmqHpTc